60431 - Finding Lost and Stolen Items Through Soothsayers and Fortune-tellers

the question

I lost an important invoice book that belongs to the company, and if it does not turn up it will cause me a great deal of trouble. I sent one of my relatives to a religious man to ask him how I could find this book. He told me to bring a child of 11 or 12 years of age and give him an egg on which was written something in blue, and he covered the child with a head-cloth and recited some Quran, then he asked the child whether he could see the one who had taken the book. The child told us of the description and name of a person we know very well but whom the child does not know. What is the ruling on that?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The saheeh ahadeeth (authentic narrations) indicate that it is haram (impermissible) to go to fortune-tellers and soothsayers, and to ask them questions and believe them. For example, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever goes to a fortune-teller and asks him about something, his prayer will not be accepted for forty days.” [Muslim].

And he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever has intercourse with a menstruating woman or with a woman in her back passage, or goes to a fortune-teller and believes him, has disbelieved in what Allah revealed to Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).” [Ahmad, Abu Dawood, al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Maajah].

Al-Baghawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The fortune-teller is the one who claims to have knowledge of things by means of certain practices which will lead him to know where stolen and lost items are, etc. Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The fortune-teller

(al-‘arraf): it was said that this refers to the soothsayer (al-kahin), who is the one who foretells the future.

And it was said that this is a general term which includes soothsayers, astrologers, geomancers and the like, who claim to have knowledge of the unseen by means of certain practices that they use. This is a more general meaning and is indicated by the derivation of the word, which is derived from m’arifah (knowledge), so it applies to all those who deal with these things and claim to have knowledge of them. Trying to find out the identity of the thief in the manner described is a kind of soothsaying and fortune-telling which is haram, as it relies on using the services of the jinn and trusting them. You should not be deceived by the fact that the fortune-teller recites the Quran, because this is just a trick that these followers of falsehood use.

See question no. 21124 for information on the signs of witches (practitioners of witchcraft), fortune-tellers and soothsayers.

Secondly:

Some scholars are of the view that the one who claims to have knowledge of stolen things, or who claims that the jinn will tell him about them is a kafir (disbeliever). Ibn Nujaym (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Bayan al-Mukaffirat: Going to a soothsayer and believing him when he says, I know where stolen things are, and what I say is based on what the jinn tell me. And he is guilty of kufr (disbelief) by saying, what I say is based on what the jinn tell me, because the jinn, like humans, do not have knowledge of the unseen, as Allah says of them (interpretation of the meaning):

“So when he fell down, the jinn saw clearly that if they had known the unseen, they would not have stayed in the humiliating torment.” [34:14]

With regard to going to a fortune-teller and asking him something, this is subject to further discussion.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Asking fortune-tellers and the like

falls into different categories:

1 – Merely asking him a question. This is haram because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever goes to a fortune-teller and asks him something, his prayer will not be accepted for forty days.” The fact that he will be punished for asking him indicates that it is haram, because there is no punishment except for doing something haram.

2 – Asking him and believing him and accepting what he says. This is kufr, because believing him with regard to knowledge of the unseen represents disbelief in the Quran, where Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Say: None in the heavens and the earth knows the Ghaib (unseen) except Allah.” [27:65]

3 – Asking him in order to test him and find out whether he is telling the truth or lying, not in order to accept what he says. There is nothing wrong with this. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked Ibn Sayyad: “What am I hiding from you?” He said: al-Dukh. He said: “Be quiet! You can never go beyond your station.”

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked him about something that he was thinking of in order to test him, and he told him of it.

4 – Asking him in order to demonstrate his inability and lies, so he tests him about some things. This may be obligatory or required.

The scholars of the Standing Committee for Issuing Fatwas were asked: Sometimes we lose some money or gold in the house, and we think that it has been stolen. So we got to one of the people (a “mukhbir”) and we tell him the story and explain that to him, and he promises to help us. Sometimes we get the lost item back and sometimes we do not. What is the ruling on our going to these people?

They replied: It is not permissible to go to him because he is a soothsayer, and it is narrated in saheeh (authentic) reports that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade going to soothsayers and the like and asking them questions and believing them. End quote.

They were also asked: You said in the previous question that going to a “mukhbir” is not permissible because he is a soothsayer. I would like to point out here that the people to whom we go are known for their adherence to the teachings of Islam. They do not recite anything except the Quran and hadeeth (prophetic narrations) with regard to matters such as those that I have mentioned in my question. What is the ruling on our going to them?

They replied: Simply reciting the Quran and hadeeth will not show them where the lost item is or bring it back. Whoever goes to someone who claims to know where lost items are just by reading the Quran and ahadeeth is going to a soothsayer and charlatan, even if he claims to be righteous and religious. He may make an outward show of reciting the Quran and hadeeth in order to mislead and deceive, but inwardly they are soothsayers and fortune-tellers. End quote.

Thirdly:

The one who goes to the fortune-teller and asks him something has to repent to Allah and regret what he has done, and resolve not to do it again. He should not accuse anyone of stealing on the basis of what the fortune-teller and his helpers among the jinn say, because the jinn tell lies. They may accuse an innocent person in order to spread corruption among the Muslims. Repentance in this case is required from the one who went to the fortune-teller and asked him, and it is also required from the one who told him to do so, because they have all fallen into sin. See question no. 32863 with regard to repentance from asking fortune-tellers and believing them.

The Muslim should beseech Allah and turn to Him when problems and calamities befall him, because all things are in His hand, as he says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Is not He (better than your gods) Who responds to the distressed one, when he calls on Him, and Who removes the evil, and makes you inheritors of the earth, generations after generations? Is there any ilah (god) with Allah? Little is that you remember!” [27:62]

It is not appropriate at all for a Muslim to put his religious commitment at risk for the sake of finding something that he has lost, because the most precious thing that the Muslim should guard is his religious commitment, and he should do whatever he can to protect it as it is more precious

than money or anything else. And it should never be the other way round, under any circumstances whatsoever.

And Allah knows best.